

Fulbright ETA
The Going to Argentina Guide
by
Stephen Coger

Hi Ya'll! (¡Hola Ustedes!)

My name is Stephen Coger. Attached please find a few things. One, the list of the previous year's (my year's) ETA's and their locations. And even the ones from the year before that.

Also, for your ideas and amusement and generally toward increasing our connectedness toward realizing our common humanness and so building a culture of social justice and peace, the list of our study topics.

I had intended to write something for you new ETAs that WASN'T stream of consciousness. But you'll see I wasn't too successful. Anyway, I hope you can benefit from and/or enjoy what follows! (It's also attached.)

Dear ETA Fulbrighters in Argentina !!

My name is Stephen Coger, and I am SO happy to meet you. I'm sure ya'll are all people that I would love to hang out with, and in fact, you are all welcome in Arkansas whenever you're able to make it out here.

I was a Fulbright ETA in Resistencia, the 400K-population capital of the state of Chaco. I had a blast.

But it wasn't all roses. It was also horseshit, and I wanted to write you all to tell you about the horseshit, the roses, and everything else.

The first four months were a bit hard for most of us. We had all traveled before, I think, to various countries. I'd been in Europe, in India, and one of us (Katie Conroy) had hit 33 countries before Argentina. Despite this, despite our experiences abroad, we still had trouble really planting ourselves in Argentina.

One of my rough spots was with my referente; he wanted me to teach in high schools for my whole eight months, alternating to a different high school every two weeks. Eventually the folks at Fulbright in Buenos Aires had to help push him to take me to my teacher training college. I made some great friends out of the teachers of those high schools, though, and even helped one win a Fulbright to come to the States!

But I digress.

To make your stay in Argentina as pleasant as possible, MASS Email all the other current Fulbright ETAs in Argentina. Build great relationships, heck, fall in love if you can. Me and Jenni (she was stationed in Mendoza) and Kathryn (she was in BA)

and Brad (we met him at the mid-way conference in Brazil, he was an ETA in Chile), we all fell in love (or as they say in India, we rose in love) and met for a camping/road trip in Puerto Madryn.

Fulbrights everywhere in the country slept on each others' sofas and floors and went traveling together, and generally made great friendships. This will make things so much easier, because even my best friends back home couldn't relate to what I was going through, and fortunately Fulbright Scholars are sufficiently cool that we tend to make friends real quick. So if you aren't normally, just relax and be super outgoing and vulnerable and trusting with our fellow Fulbrights.

As regards your ETA work... I was just reviewing all the emails I received from the Fulbright ETAs that went to Argentina the year before me, and they did things like set up regular movie showings as well as doing their research. I didn't really have any research to do, but I did arrange all kinds of pizza and empanada dinners at my college students' houses and at my own. I hosted a Thanksgiving dinner, too, towards the end. I worked with the nearby university to teach swimming lessons in their awesome pool to my elementary school music students, and then I did continue to teach and have tons of fun twice a week in the best high school that I was coerced into working at.

As regards the humanscape... I learned to love being able to interrupt people. In fact, that was one of the biggest culture shocks. An English professor at the teacher training college where I was working explained it to her class, and it really snapped for me. I was coming from India where people talk and then the listener waited a moment and then responded (generally). Then she explained that in America people talk and then respond without that break. And in Argentina people talk as the partner in the conversation is talking. This took some getting used to, but eventually I loved it. (I remember once I was visiting with the owner of this great *panaderia* when he said that *la indigena* del Chaco didn't know how to use fire and I just interrupted him and told that what he was saying was trash, and he was like, "Yeah! I love visiting with you!")

Another problem might be the "money orders" aka "giro postales" that the Ministry of Education might send to you late occasionally and that you might find that you have to go to a specific post office in a particular city and that you have to go BEFORE they run out of the pesos they pay you. Make sure you let the Min. of Ed. know if you don't get your money on time, and tell them if they need to have it sent to a bigger post office with more money or an otherwise more convenient one. They can do it.

If you're a vegetarian like I became after a few weeks in Argentina, you better know how to cook! Hah. Or else you'll be eating a lot of pizza. I recommend you go out and buy a pressure cooker. They're easy to use, and you can make your protein-filled black beans (*porotos negros*) or lentils (*lentejas*) or garbanzos (*garbanzos*) soft in no time. And if you eat these with some greens and brown rice or another whole grain,

you'll be doing your body good. Brown rice and a bean and you'll have a complete protein, and a rhyme. If you want some recipes, let me know.

And I know you don't know me, but if you did, you'd know that I already am quite fond of you and would give you a huge hug and cook you some veggie butternut squash curry with homemade peanut butter on an apple for desert if I were there or you were here. ANYTIME you want, drop me an email or a Facebook message, or call me on Skype, and we'll visit. I am so happy for you.

So that you can know me, I'll tell you a little bit about me; I love Michael Franti, Earl Chinna Smith, Seba Ibarra (a musician from Resistencia), music-wise, and Frisbee, friends, cats, and swimming holes, everything-else wise. I'm going to go to law school, and enjoy growing food and cooking and eating it.

Yours,
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Fulbright ETA
The Return to the US Guide
by
Stephen Coger

Hi Ya'll! (¡Hola Ustedes!)

Hopefully you've all had such wonderful 8+ months of life that you've forgotten me. I was an ETA in Resistencia, Chaco, Argentina in 2009. I had such a hard time leaving that beautiful place and coming to this beautiful place that I just wanted to let you know that if you need anyone to talk with about your transition back to life in the US, you can call me. I guess I'm a "stranger" to you, bbuutt, I'm an odd stranger in that we lived a similar experience and that I talk with strangers a lot like I talk with my closest friends/family.

Happy Thanksgiving, by the way!!

I bet some of you stuck around in South America. I applaude you, if you did! What fun.

For those of you back in the States, please do not feel alarmed if you feel a little wobbly. One friend of mine who did a year in Argentina went to therapy when he got back; it was a really rough transition. Part of it, he said, was that he felt that in Argentina people were so more personable; politics is very important to him, too, and he felt that in the US he was unable to talk about things that matter for fear that people would get upset.

(I was so proud of myself when I first participated actively in loud, no-personal-space style political conversations in Resistencia. Someone from Resistencia was talking about how stupid "the Indians" were/are, and I told him that what he was saying was false and that it was "basura." He was so happy that I was engaged and having fun. I was, too.)

After India, I had an experience the first time I went out with friends in Arkansas... I was listening to great music, and with my favorite people, but just started kind shaking and wanting to be alone. I'm not sure what it was, but I was thinking things like, "Last month I was in the Himalaya, sopping wet in the Ganges, and now I'm in Arkansas... nobody's trying to steal from me and everyone speaks the same language. This is strange. Really uncomfortable and strange." In other words, it was a big change for me, a big shift back to US life.

Well, after Argentina, I missed my Argentinian family somethin'

fierce, and my transition was made even more rough by a pretty major fall out with two friends shortly after getting back. I've noticed that people I hung out with before my trip to India, I didn't hang with all them after India, and the same was true of the Argentina experience. So I hope you will joyously roll and grow in any new/old relationships that blossom in the coming months.

Maybe now you're going to continue traveling, or resume working, or studying, or whatevs. I decided to work a year, take the LSAT, and then go to law school NEXT year. Remember that life seems burdensome when we only relax in between action, and that we can discover an abiding relaxation during action regardless of context and conditions. And know that you can always call this stranger if you need to visit with someone who is, at least, mildly entertaining.

If you are ever in Northwest Arkansas and want some yummy vegan Indian food, you know you have a place to stay. Just call.

Yours,
Stephen Coger
479.495.0248

ps I'm always going to be visiting Argentina if any of ya'll are gonna be there and want to meet up!! I'm going to keep playing music with a musician friend there (check out his tunes at <http://www.cdbaby.com/Search/c2ViYSBpYmFycmE%3d/0>)

pps I'm so glad that people like you are in the world with me! Exciting!